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## Topic 26

# THE ATOMIC BOMB

1945

*On July 16, 1945, an atomic bomb was successfully detonated at Alamogordo, New Mexico. On August 6, a second one exploded over the city of Hiroshima with an explosive force equivalent to 20,000 tons of TNT. Three days later, a more powerful one exploded over Nagasaki, and on August 10, Japan called for an armistice with the provision that Emperor Hirohito retain his throne. General Douglas MacArthur accepted the formal Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay on September 2.*

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**TOKYO. *The Nippon Times*, August 10, 1945.**

In the air attack on Hiroshima Monday morning, the enemy used a new type of bomb of unprecedented power. Not only has the greater part of the city been wiped out, but an extraordinary proportion of the inhabitants have been either killed or injured. The use of a weapon of such terrifying destructiveness not only commands attention as a matter of a new technique in the conduct of war. More fundamentally and vitally it opens up a most grave and profound moral problem in which the very future of humanity is put at stake.

Whether the enemy fully realizes the moral implications of the use of such an instrument of destruction or not, he cannot escape the awful responsibility for his action. For there is

no doubt that he has carried out this deed with cold-hearted calculation. This was no mere excess committed in the heat of battle. It was an act of premeditated wholesale murder, the deliberate snuffing out of the lives of tens of thousands of innocent civilians who had no chance of protecting themselves in the slightest degree. How deliberate and callous the enemy is in his unprincipled action is proved by the infamous threat of President Truman to use this diabolic weapon on an increasing scale.

How utterly unjustifiable is the resort to such an inhumane method of warfare needs no arguing. It goes without saying that such action flagrantly contravenes the basic principle of international law as expressed in Article XXII of The Hague Convention in Regard to the Laws of War which definitely proclaims that belligerent nations can have no claim to a right to exercise unlimited power. For, what is it but a presumptuous abuse of unlimited and unprincipled power when the United States resorts to the use of such a weapon as this bomb which spreads indiscriminate and wanton destruction upon an extensive civilian population?

But it is not primarily a matter of legal justifiability or even of the principles of international conduct. It is a matter which goes to the very heart of the fundamental concept of human morality. How can a human being with any claim to a sense of moral responsibility deliberately let loose an instrument of destruction which can at one stroke annihilate an appalling [*sic*] segment of mankind? This is not war; this is not even murder; this is pure nihilism. This is a crime against God and humanity which strikes at the very basis of moral existence. What meaning is there in any international law, in any rule of human conduct, in any concept of right and wrong, if the very foundations of morality are to be overthrown as the use of this instrument of total destruction threatens to do?

The crime of the Americans stands out in ghastly repulsiveness all the more for the ironic contradiction it affords to their lying pretensions. For in their noisy statements, they have always claimed to be the champions of fairness and humanitarianism. In the early days of the China Affair, the United States repeatedly

protested against the bombing operations of the Japanese forces notwithstanding the fact that the Japanese operations were conducted on a limited scale against strictly military objectives. But where its own actions are concerned, the United States seems to see no inconsistency in committing on an unimaginably vast scale the very same crime it had falsely accused others of committing.

This hypocritical character of the Americans had already been amply demonstrated in the previous bombings of Japanese cities. Strewing explosives and fire bombs indiscriminately over an extensive area, hitting large cities and small towns without distinction, wiping out vast districts which could not be mistaken as being anything but strictly residential in character, burning or blasting to death countless thousands of helpless women and children, and machine-gunning fleeing refugees, the American raiders had already shown how completely they violate in their actual deeds the principles of humanity which they mouth in conspicuous pretense.

But now beside the latest technique of total destruction which the Americans have adopted, their earlier crimes pale into relative insignificance. What more barbarous atrocity can there be than to wipe out at one stroke the population of a whole city without distinction—men, women, and children; the aged, the weak, the infirm; those in positions of authority, and those with no power at all; all snuffed out without being given a chance of lifting even a finger in either defense or defiance!

The United States may claim, in a lame attempt to raise a pretext in justification of its latest action, that a policy of utter annihilation is necessitated by Japan's failure to heed the recent demand for unconditional surrender. But the question of surrendering or not surrendering certainly can have not the slightest relevance to the question of whether it is justifiable to use a method which under any circumstance is strictly condemned alike by the principles of international law and of morality. For this American outrage against the fundamental moral sense of mankind, Japan must proclaim to the world its protest against the United States which has made itself the archenemy of humanity.

### LONDON. *The Times*, August 8, 1945.

An impenetrable cloud of dust and smoke, standing over the ruin of the great Japanese arsenal at Hiroshima, still veils the undoubtedly stupendous destruction wrought by the first impact in war of the atomic bomb. A mist no less impenetrable is likely for a long time to conceal the full significance in human affairs of the release of the vast and mysterious power hitherto locked within the infinitesimal units of which the material structure of the universe is built up. All that can be said with certainty is that the world stands in the presence of a revolution in earthly affairs at least as big with potentialities of good and evil as when the forces of steam or electricity were harnessed for the first time to the purposes of industry and war.

It has to be sorrowfully acknowledged that these epoch-making conquests of science are no sooner achieved than they are turned to the purposes of mutual destruction. Thus war battens on peace. This time, however, it is the pressure of war itself that has forced ahead a process which can be turned against war in the long run and at the same time promises a greater material enrichment of life than any single scientific discovery before it. Science itself is neutral, like the blind forces of nature that it studies and aspires to control. Nations fighting for their existence, however, seek to make science their ally by enlisting men of science in their service. As men of science they seek only truth, but as patriots in the hour of their country's danger they are legitimately called upon to deflect their researchers as policy and strategy require. The immense expenditure incurred in the quest of the atomic bomb—that is to say the immense share of the total manpower and material resources of the allied nations put at the disposal of the comparatively few scientists directing the quest—amounting as it has done to two thousand million dollars, is out of all proportion to anything that scientific research can command in time of peace. There is no need to interpret this fact cynically; these vast sums were risked—for the project was, as PRESIDENT TRUMAN says, “a gamble”—as a means to ensure the survival

of a civilization in which the disinterested pursuit of knowledge might again be made secure . . . the urgencies of war have but hastened—probably by many years—a discovery that the great physicists of the world have long foreseen, and towards which they have been moving by the patient processes of the laboratory for many years past.

Imagination shudders at the thought that this terrifying power might have fallen into the hands of the enemies of civilization instead of its protectors. It is known that Nazi Germany was seeking frantically after the secret; and many gallant British and Norwegian lives were spent in thwarting the design. The allies, however, have a right to feel that it is no accident which won them the momentous race. They have achieved an outstanding intellectual victory over the enemy, and it is a victory that comes to them by right. It is significant that two of the outstanding scientists named as collaborators in the Anglo-American programme experiment were German subjects exiled from their country on the ground of race. Preeminence in the pursuit of knowledge must belong to a social system in which men, whatever their origin, are free to follow “whithersoever the argument may lead”; in the intellectual sphere as on the battlefield, the discipline of free minds has its inalienable advantage.

Speculation can only peer a little way into the future that the new power opens for the world. The issue of the Japanese war, already certain, must be greatly hastened, whether the rulers of Tokyo acknowledge by surrender the demonstration that the allies hold them in the hollow of their hand, or insist on immolating their country before the irresistible power of the new weapon, which is amply acknowledged in their latest broadcasts. If they choose the second alternative, it seems likely that the allies may be able to accomplish, what RUNDSTEDT is said to have expected to achieve against Britain, the destruction of Japanese resistance in the home islands by air power alone, leaving to the army the role of occupation only. Beyond the Japanese war the consequences for strategy and grand tactics are vast but incalculable. Presumably all fortification, as it has been hitherto understood, becomes immediately obsolete, for nothing can resist the

new force. Schemes for world security founded on the maintenance of bases at the strategic points of the globe will call for exhaustive reconsideration.

All strategic calculations, however, become insignificant before the evident challenge to the people of the world to rise to the fateful occasion in such a degree as to make strategy itself speedily irrelevant. Beyond all doubt, unless atomic power is turned to serve the aims of peace, it can speedily make an end of civilized life on earth. It will not serve those aims through the mere dissemination of the knowledge that renewal of war now means universal destruction and collapse. History, especially the history of recent times in which the instruments of destruction and torment have so rapidly multiplied, holds out no expectation that men will ever be deterred from war by fear alone; and on the whole that is to the credit of human nature. If the secular curse is to be laid, it must be by the positive love of peace. Reason will tell mankind that war is becoming with certainty suicidal. But reason will no more avail than the appeal to fear. Humanity must be able to call upon deeper convictions. All that can be directly expected because of the existence of the new terrifying power is a livelier sense among statesmen and the peoples to whom they are answerable of the weight of the responsibility of choosing between peace and war. . . .

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CAPETOWN [SOUTH AFRICA]. *The Guardian*, August 9, 1945.

News of the most recent war weapon, the atomic bomb, with a blasting power two thousand times greater than that of any other bomb, will be used as a text for sermons on the horrors of war and its immense dangers to the whole of humanity.

Other developments in the war against Japan could be used to drive home the same lesson. As, for instance, the use of a naval force some thousands of miles from any land base in order to carry out devastating raids on the enemy.

No country, no matter how remote, can be held immune from

attack. South Africa today is as exposed to the dangers of war as any Balkan State.

But it is not the growth of the destructive weapons of warfare that will put an end to war. No matter how afraid we human beings may be of the consequences, we shall continue to be persuaded, bluffed and bullied into going to war if our rulers so desire.

In order to stop wars, we must put an end to the conditions that produce them. Not by atomic bombs, but by scrapping the system of imperialism, the search for markets and profits, will we stop war.

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MEXICO CITY. *Excelsior*, December 9, 1945.

It is a presently known fact that universal science for some time has been studying, analyzing and writing about the explosive phenomenon of the atom and that in several countries like Germany, England and the United States, groups of scientists have absorbed themselves in the discovery of what someone has designated the philosopher's stone of the Middle Ages. It was a problem of life or death. Whoever produced the small bomb of terrifying effects not only would succeed in overpowering the enemy of the time and win that war but also could depend on that weapon [being] considered as definitive in the field of experimentation. First were the results on those deserted fields of New Mexico and it was seen how two men at a distance of eight kilometers were blown up. Secondly, a Japanese city of 300,000 inhabitants was erased from the map. Still, there is no definite data, only real observations and photographs to confirm the fact. The disintegrating power of that atomic force is of such a nature that the Japanese Cabinet of War convened convinced of the need to study the new conditions of attack; and the United Nations sent a new ultimatum to the Japanese Government assuring it that if it did not accept their conditions, the cities of its empire would fly into clouds converted into ashes. Once more the Latin phrase was confirmed: "If you want peace, prepare for war."



But this formidable scientific discovery, today in the power of the North American armies, has unusual repercussions. . . . Its possession concedes a world hegemony that can in certain circumstances be more dangerous than the anger of Nature. It suffices to think what would have become of us if the German scientists had handed over to Hitler the murderous bomb. That delirium of greatness of the Fuehrer would have been imposed on all the world and its diabolical power would have made the living of the five parts of world tremble. It can be nothing more than a system of destruction, we say. The chemical procedure can be carried out outside of the United States and, moreover, its power as a supreme recourse can be given over to a commission of nations, guardians of peace. The threat of the atomic bomb would suffice, perhaps, to keep within reason any abrupt rebellion of tomorrow. . . .

. . . As peace is hastened it ought to be credited in blood and money to the famous atomic bomb, and moreover, it should be expected that the morality of the conquering nations will permit use of it only as a heavy footstool of universal peace.